



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE ORIGINALITY OF THE APOCALYPSE.

By REV. PROFESSOR GEORGE H. GILBERT, PH.D., D.D.
Chicago Theological Seminary.

The aim of the paper. — Originality in the structure of the Apocalypse. — In its form. — The unity in its visions. — Original names for the Deity. — The descriptions of Christ. — References to Satan. — The beasts. — The judgment. — The descriptions of glorified believers. — The struggles of the followers of Christ. — Conclusion.

I.

The aim of the present paper is literary rather than doctrinal. I wish to show (*a*) how much of the structure and symbolism of the Apocalypse is to be regarded as an original product of John's mind, and (*b*) how much is either directly quoted from other Scripture or is at least largely colored by it, and (*c*) what relation, if any, the Apocalypse sustains to non-canonical Jewish writings of an apocalyptic character. These questions are of great interest as bearing both upon the authorship and the interpretation of the Apocalypse.

First, then, in regard to the structure of the Apocalypse, it can safely be said that it is unique. There is nothing like it elsewhere in Jewish literature, nor anything out of which it might have been developed. The first section of the book—the least original part—consists of a vision of Christ followed by his messages to seven churches. The speaker characterizes himself, in the first three letters, by symbols drawn from the initial vision (1:12–20); and in part he does so in the fourth and fifth letters. The structure of the letters themselves is original. Each at the beginning purports to be from Christ to a particular church; and each at the close is said to be a message of the Spirit to all the churches. Each of the letters is made up of the same elements, and these are in the same order with one exception. In the first three letters, the promise is at the end, immediately preceded by the injunction to hear what the Spirit says; in the last four letters

the injunction is at the end, immediately preceded by the promise. The other elements of the letters are (*a*) a symbolical designation of the speaker, (*b*) a statement of his knowledge of the church to which he is writing, and (*c*) the special message. The letters are thus highly artificial, and yet they are so varied in content and so rich in thought that the artificiality is not unpleasantly prominent. These letters form the basis and background for the subsequent portions of the Apocalypse.

The form in which the thought of the body of the book is presented is striking and poetical. All disclosures regarding the future are drawn by the author from a book which lies on the right hand of God. This book is sealed to all created beings in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. Only Christ is able to make its contents known. His agency in this work of revelation is formally stated only in connection with the seven seals, but is everywhere implied (1:1; 22:16). He opens the seals one after another, and the message of each appears in concrete, breathing forms. It is something to be seen, not read. In the case of the sixth seal the content is cosmical. There is an earthquake, an eclipse, the falling of stars, the removal of the firmament of heaven, and of every mountain and island. Between the sixth and seventh seals there is an episode (chap. 7), not formally developed out of the seals and yet doubtless to be considered a part of the revelation of Christ and a part of the content of the sealed book. The seventh seal is the last, and yet its opening does not immediately bring the consummation. It ushers in seven angels with trumpets. One by one these sound. Between the sixth and the seventh, as in the last series, there is an episode (10:1-11:13), in the course of which it is solemnly announced that the consummation will be in the days of the seventh angel. But the trumpet of the seventh angel ushers in the vision of the dragon and his embodiments (12:1-14:20). This in turn leads to the vision of the seven bowls (15:1-19:10), and this to the vision of the consummation (19:11-20:15). Then the way has been prepared for the vision of the new heaven and the new earth, which with its outlook over the ages of ages closes the revelation.

This is, in general, the structure of the book. It is not borrowed or copied, but is original with the author, and there is no literary form coined by any writer of ancient or modern times which is more unique than this.

Christ in the midst of the churches forms the first vision; Christ in the midst of the redeemed, the last vision. The five intervening visions are visions of conflict. There is progress from one vision to another, moral and intensive rather than chronological. The judgments grow more and more severe, and at the same time the manifestations of Christ become more glorious. The songs that are heard from the heavenly world are increasingly triumphant in character. The interest of the reader is sustained, yea, heightened, as he passes from vision to vision. The end is again and again postponed, but only that the forces and issues of the intervening history may be brought before us in symbols of increasing majesty and power. No vision could be omitted, no vision could exchange places with any other, without seriously marring the harmony of the whole.

But it is not needful to dwell longer on this point. We may ask now for that element in the symbolism of the Apocalypse which may fairly be said to be the coinage of John's own imagination. This element is very large. To begin with his designations of the Divine Being. He has for God the suggestive name "He who is, and who was, and who is to come" (1:4, 8; 4:8). This expression implies not only the unchangeableness and eternity of God, but also his coming into manifestation. Thus it contains the central idea of the Apocalypse which is the parousia of the Lord. For this reason the third clause of the name is omitted when God is thought of as already come (11:17; 16:5) and he is called simply "He who is and was." Both God the Father and Christ are designated "the Alpha and the Omega" (1:8; 22:13), a new name, though the thought is the same as that in Isa. 44:6: "I am the first and I am the last." Jesus is further called "the Amen" (3:14), a designation natural enough on the lips of the author of the Fourth Gospel who alone represents Jesus as using the repeated particle of assurance, "verily, verily" (amen, amen). The Apocalypse also gives to him the name

‘The lion of the tribe of Judah’ (5:5). The Holy Spirit is referred to under the symbols of “seven spirits” (1:4; 3:1), “seven torches of fire,” and “seven eyes” of Christ (4:5; 5:6).

Passing now from appellations in the narrower sense, we find in the author’s descriptions of the Divine Being much that is purely original. Thus he likens the appearance of God to a jasper and a sardius (4:3), these stones probably being used to suggest white and red radiance (21:11; Ezek. 8:2). New is also the author’s statement that God is the *temple* in heaven (21:22); and his description of the majesty of God in the judgment scene, where he says that from his face the earth and the heaven fled away (20:11).

Yet more illustrations of the author’s originality may be seen in his symbolic descriptions of Christ. He is the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, and who walks in the midst of the seven golden candles (2:1). He has seven horns and seven eyes (5:6). Twice he is represented as a warrior on a white horse, once with bow in hand and a victor’s wreath on his head, and once having on his head many diadems (6:1, 2; 19:11). He has a name which no one else knows (19:12; 3:12.) He is the one who gives the redeemed their song of redemption (15:3). He is the *lamp* of heaven (21:23). His victorious strength as a warrior is set forth in an original manner by giving him the wreath of victory *before* he enters the struggle (6:2), and also by representing him as vanquishing the kings of the earth with their armies without any effort or clash of arms (19:20). His simple word overthrows them.

There is much that is wholly original in the author’s references to Satan. Such is his representation of him as a great red dragon (12:3), and his picture of Satan’s power in the statement that his tail draws a third of the stars of heaven (12:4). Original with him is the idea of a war in the upper air between Michael and Satan, each supported by his angels (12:7), a war which ends in the casting of Satan and his angels upon the earth (12:9). So his picture of Satan as a dragon emitting a flood of water from its throat in order to destroy the woman (12:15). The author’s beast out of the sea is not wholly original; it has a prototype in

Daniel. But his conception of the relation of the beast to Satan is his own. The dragon stands on the shore of the sea to call up the beast (12:18). It then gives to the beast its throne and authority and indestructibility (13:2-3). Through the beast it secures the worship of the whole earth, *i. e.* the worship of all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life (13:4, 8).

The beast out of the earth, having a lamb's horns and a dragon's voice, is an original creation (13:11). So are some of the details of the picture, as, for example, the fact that this beast makes an idol and endows it with intelligence and the power of speech (13:15), also the fact that it causes all the followers of the first beast to have its mark on their right hands or on their foreheads (13:16).

We may notice next that which is original in the author's language of judgment. He coined the symbol "second death" (2:11; 21:8). Synonymous with this, and also original with the author of the Apocalypse, is the symbol "lake of fire" (19:20). Among the many emblems of temporal judgment several of the most notable are, as far as can be ascertained, the product of John's imagination. A star by the name of wormwood falls on a third of the rivers and fountains of waters, and the consequence is that the water is turned to wormwood (8:11). The fourth angel poured out its bowl of wrath upon the sun, and the result was a burning heat which led men to blaspheme the name of God (16:8, 9). The terrible symbol of the scorpion-locusts and the still more terrible symbol of horses with lion's heads and tails that are serpents,—horses that emit fire and brimstone from their mouths, these are creations of John's imagination, and it may be doubted whether any more forcible materialistic symbols of judgment were ever coined. The locusts come out of the abyss as messengers of Satan (9:11). They have intelligence, and go forth under the leadership of Satan. The horses are innumerable, and they too seem to be connected with the abyss, for they emit brimstone from their mouths, and this in the Apocalypse is associated only with the abode of Satan.

The Apocalypse abounds in original symbols in its descrip-

tions of the glory and blessedness of the victorious disciple of Christ. No portion of Scripture of equal length surpasses it in this respect. Thus the victor is promised authority over the nations (2:26, 27), and shall receive the morning star (2:28). He shall walk with Christ in white robes (3:4), and shall follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth (14:1). He shall be a pillar in the temple of God, abiding as long as the temple itself abides (3:14); he shall also *serve* God day and night in his temple (7:15). He shall stand before the throne with palms in his hands (7:9), and shall sing by the transparent lake (15:2). He shall sit with Christ in His throne (3:21), and have on his forehead the name of God, the name of the new Jerusalem, and the new name of Christ (3:12; 14:1). In this connection may be mentioned the original features in the author's picture of heaven. These are three. The first is that the length, breadth and *height* of the new Jerusalem are equal, the city being thus one vast Holy of Holies (21:16); the second is that God and the Lamb are the temple of this new Jerusalem (21:22); and the third is the transparent lake on whose shores the redeemed stand as they sing the song of Moses and the Lamb (15:2; 4:6).

It remains to notice the original symbols which are employed in the description of the struggle between the followers of Christ and the followers of anti-Christ. Here we have Death on horseback, slaying men, and Hades, also on horseback, receiving the slain (6:7-8). The souls of the martyrs are seen under the altar, —the altar, that is, on which their bodies had been slain (6:9). When the kings of the earth are to be brought together to Har Magedon unto the war of the great day of God, the spirits of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet go forth as *frogs* to deceive them (16:13). The destruction of Babylon is graphically set forth by describing the effect of it upon the kings, the merchants and the sailors, who, gathered from near and far, stand at a distance from the city and watch it as it burns (18:9-19). The suppression of Satan's influence is set forth under the figure of Satan bound with a great chain and put into the abyss, whose door was then sealed.

Such briefly are the original elements in the symbolism of

the Apocalypse. In estimating their significance it is well to bear in mind that the entire Apocalypse is only about one-ninth as long as *Paradise Lost*, or one-third as long as *Hamlet*. Were there no originality in the book outside the passages which have been noticed, the Apocalypse would still rank with the few great products of creative imagination ; but, as we shall see, this is not all. The use of Old Testament symbolism in the Apocalypse is everywhere suggestive of an independent and original mind.